

Accession Number: A/7

Classification:

Date: 10 May 1974 11:00-12:15 p.m.

Place: Evanston 1107 Garnett Place

Interview with: Mrs. John J. Spencer

Interview by: S.F. Patton

Observations: Interview in private home. I was informed before coming that she was incapacitated. Vagueness about dates probably due to age and effects of illness: a weak heart. She is not loquacious person. Before I began to ask questions he said her first name was Indian

1. Q. Your first name is Indian

A. Yes, Osceola. Spencer is my last name

2 Q. What was your maiden name

A. Outlaw

3 Q. Were you born in Evanston

A. No, I was born in Westpoint, Miss. I'm 86 years old. I came here in 1918. My family were pioneers

4 Q. Did your father and mother come here when you arrived

A. No, my parents arrived before I came in 1918

5 Q. When did your father and mother arrive

A. Let's see, my two sister, my aunt and uncle were here before me. They arrived maybe six years before me.

6 Q. Your father and mother arrived six years before

A. Yes. His sister and her daughter and her husband, they built the Second Baptist Church on Benson.

7 Q. Your sister's husband built the Baptist church

A. No. My father's son-in-law built the church. They came from mississippi also.

- 8 Q. What was your father's sister name
A. Arabella Shanks
- 9 Q. What was her maiden name
A. Outlaw.
- 10 Q. What was her daughter's name
A. Lamonia, she married Reverend Dayles
- 11 Q. Reverend Dayles built the Second Baptist
A. Yes he started building it; the foundation and the basement
- 12 Q. Were Blacks allowed in the First Baptist Church
A. Yes, but he pulled out
- 13 Q. Why. Did you ever find out
A. No, he was building the church when I came
- 14 Q. You said other members of the family came to Evanston
A. Yes, two sisters. My mother came on a visit. Very few Negroes lived in Evanston then
- 15 Q. About how many lived in Evanston
A. About 30
- 16 Q. Did they live more or less in the same area
A. They lived in south-west Evanston, on Greenwood, not Greenleaf but greenwood
- 17 Q. This was around 1910 or 1912
A. Yes
- 18 Q. What were your sisters names
A. My sisters: Clothea Holmes and the other was Sarah Outlaw
- 19 Q. Is Sarah alive

A. No around a year ago today; the day after Mother's day I believe we buried her. She was 90 or 91. She never married

20 Q. How old is Clothea

A. She says she is 75. She's very active. She works for the Mt. Sinai Church

21 Q. Did you like Evanston when you arrived

A. No. I figured I'd go back home. John Spencer, my husband, he was a big-shot insurance man. He got scare of the draft, and he caught the next train to Evanston. I was expecting a baby then.

22 Q. When did your husband come here

A. Six months after I did

23 Q. Did you stay with your mother and father when you arrived

A. Yes. We were living on Darrow then. Let's see, about one and a half years

24 Q. How many children do you have

A. Nine, they're all living

25 Q. All of them live in Evanston

A. The oldest three are lawyers. One in Wa.D.C.; a son. One is in Los Angeles. The other in New York. The others are girls. There's Doc Spencer

26 Q. What about the other children

A. One taught, she lives in Evanston, and is getting a Ph. d. One is in Waukegan and takes care... Another lives in Cleveland.

27 Q. What kind of work did your mother and father do

A. My father was what you called a "jack-legged" preacher. He worked as a janitor at Weiboldts. My mother never worked.

28 Q. Did you ever work

A. I went to school: U. of Chgo at night, to study social

work. Then I went to Northwestern in the day. My oldest son said if I went to school he would not. So I quit and took nurse training to become a practical nurse.

29 Q. When were you at U. of Chicago

A. Let's see, I had three children in high school at the time. I was taking sociology courses. I can't remember now

30 Q. How long were you at the Univ. of Chicago

A. Three months, I went to classes in the loop

31 Q. Was it right after that you attended Northwestern

A. Yes, I went in the days in the summer. I went two summers at Northwestern. I was two quarters at Chicago. I had graduated from a seminary at WestPoint, Miss. I knew I had to have a degree for social work and to put the children through college

32 Q. What was the name of the seminary

A. Mary Holmes Seminary. It is a college now

33 Q. How old were you when you graduated from Seminary

A. I think 17 years old

34 Q. How old were you when you married

A. I was 26. I taught school in between the time I left the seminary and when I married.

35 Q. Did you teach primary grades before you married

A. All grades up to 8th---in one room then

36 Q. You got married in Miss.

A. Yes

37 Q. Do you remember the date

A. I don't know. I was 26 then, I'm now 86. It must have been around 1914

38 Q. Was your husband from Westpoint

A. No he lived in Memphis. It was in Corinth, Miss. where we met. He hadn't much education, he did finish high school

39 Q. Do you remember the company he worked for

A. Mississippi Life Ins. When he came he could not get along with Northern Negroes. He became a pullman porter

40 Q. What railroad, the Northwestern

A. No. He went all the way to San Francisco. He would be gone for two weeks at a time

41 Q. Was it the Santa Fe

A. I might think of it

42 Q. The train station was in Chicago

A. Yeah

43 A. How long did your husband work for the railroad

A. Until retirement. He's been dead 8 years

44 Q. Was that the only job Blacks had on the railroad

A. Yes

45 Q. Did he ever tell you about his experiences on the road

A. He'd tell me funny experiences. Oh, I did not tell you about Paul. He lives here with me; he's an artist. He is a sign painter. I can't go upstairs you know. My blood pressure isn't right; my heart is weak. I can not stand long enough to cook bacon. My dinner and supper is brought on wheels for 12 months. My sister cooks for me also

My food is brought by St. Francis Hospital. My son is on the staff at St. Francis, the Evanston Hospital and another hospital on Howard st, and the Community Hospital

46 Q. What are your son name

A. Warren, I call him Frankie, Frank is his middle name

47 Q. What are the name of your children, beginning with the oldest

A. John, Sarah, Margarite, Grace, Warren, Helen, Bertha Paul and Clothea

48 Q. How long did your father work at Weiboldts

A. Three years

49 Q. Do you remember what he did after that

A. He just wanted a job

50 Q. How old was he when he worked at Weiboldts

A. I can't remember now. Leave that question blank

51 Q. When you arrived here were you expecting your first child

A. No, my second. My husband came soon afterwards

52 Q. Did you like Evanston when you arrived

A. No

53 Q. What was it about Evanston you did not like

A. I claimed I was lonesome for home

54 Q. Were Blacks friendly here

A. Yes. Everybody knew everybody

55 Q. Can you remember the names of any of the families

A. I was living in Foster District. I became president and organized the P.T.A. at Foster

56 Q. How long after your children

A. I got a babysitter

57 Q. You had three children then

A. I think so...

58 Q. You had all of them when organizing the P.T.A.

A. Let's see the oldest one was in first grade. I had about three in school; they 6,7,8 years old then

59 Q. After the P.T.A. were you involved in any other activities

A. Oh, I was involved in a little of everything. You know the Community House on the corner, I organized and bought the

home. It is a woman's club. There were White and Black members. Also the teachers and students at Northwestern U. and I organized to fight segregation. I would teach my children at home. I sent my children over here which was all white. I lived next door to Foster school then. The principal of the school wanted me to keep my children at Foster. I told her I have as much right as anybody to send my children any where I thought. The principal said she would put my children back in fourth grade; they were in the sixth grade then. I fought it. We owned a house at 1016

60 Q. What was name of the school

A. ^{No yes} Norris St School. Foster had eight grades

61 Q. How many grades did Norris have

A. ^{No yes} Norris had 6 grades. The Negroes were sent to Foster instead of junior high. I'd see Mr Styles, that superintendent. I could get what I wanted from him ^{styles}

62 Q. You mentioned a house on 1016

A. Yes, 1016 Garnett

63 Q. Were there any Blacks living here then

A. Mrs. Cora Watson and Anna Watson. She is 90 years old There was one family. My sister bought 1016. We moved there

64 Q. You were living next to Foster just before this

A. Yes. I remember the address, 1820 Foster. Anyway the older children went to Haven; the younger ones here. I bought two houses.

65 Q. Where were the houses

A. Right together. One in front, one in back

66 Q. What was the address

A. 1820 and 1822 Foster

67 Q. How long did you live there

A. six to eight years. Then I lost it

68 Q. Why did you lose house

A. I could not work. My husband couldn't keep up the payments.

69 Q. Where did you move after this

A. 1016 until here

70 Q. Did you stay at 1016 around ten years

A. Not quite

71 Q. How old were you at 1820 Foster

A. I don't know

72 Q. Was it before the Depression you were at Foster

A. I was at 1016 during the Depression

73 Q. What do you remember about the Depression

A. I was on relief. My sister worked half a day for relatively rich Whites. She would send me six quarts of milk a day

74 Q. How much payment did you receive for relief

A. I was trying to remember how many children I had then. No idea. My husband was still writing insurance, but people had no money, and so no commission.

75 Q. Your husband during the Depression worked for an insurance company

A. That is when he got depressed and went on the road

76 Q. Your sister worked for White family during the Depression

A. I think so

77 Q. What were her specific duties

A. There were two old White people. She went there every day at 1:00, made the beds, got lunch and dinner ready

78 Q. She would be home at 7:00 p.m.

A. Yeah

79 Q. How much would she earn a week

A. Around \$20 a week

Accession Number: A/7-b

Classification:

Date: 23 May 1974 1:00-3:50 p.m.

Place: 1107 Garnett Place

Interview with: Mrs. John J. Spencer

Interview by: S. F. Patton

Observations: Interview held in private home. Her sister, Clothea and an unidentified male friend were with Mrs. Spencer. Mrs. Spencer's mind seemed more alert than the previous visit

1 Q. You had said your cousins were pioneers

A. Yes. My aunt and her daughter

2 Q. When were they here

A. Six years before I came, no maybe longer than that.

3 Q. What were their names

A. Arabella Simmons. She married a man named Shanks
She came here because her husband was a pastor here. B.P.E.
Gayles married her daughter; she was married when she came here

4 Q. Gayles was a pastor too

A. Yes, Second Baptist.

5 Q. Did Arabella marry Shanks after her arrival in Evanston

A. Yes. They had my sister Sarah come here to nurse the children

6 Q. How old was Arabella then

A. She was old. She is my father's sister. She was old when she married Shanks

7 Q. Past her thirties

A. Oh yes.

8 Q. Did she spend her entire life in Evanston

A. No. They went to Aurora and stayed there until Uncle Ceseear Simmons died, then they came back here.

I came in 1918, Margaret was born that's why I came

9 Q. Remember where Arabella lived in Evanston

A. I don't know she was on Greenwood when I arrived
(Clothea: she was on 1615 Greenwood then)

10 Q. Clothea arrived years before you

A. Yes, maybe almost two years
(Clothea: 1917)

11 Q. Did she stay here after coming from Aurora until the end of her life

A. Yes. She died here

12 Q. Arabella had only one child

A. Yes

13 Q. What was her name

A. Lemonia

14 Q. Is she still alive

A. She has been dead, 50 years ago

15 Q. Did she have any children

A. Ben, Willie, Edna and Leslie

16 Q. Did your aunt work

A. She was a dressmaker

17 Q. Did she sew at home

A. She went out in the day

18 Q. She worked in families homes

A. Private homes and in her own home

19 Q. She sew dresses, draperies

A. Dressmaker is the word

20 Q. Did she work long hours

A. She worked 8 hours a day

21 Q. Did she earn much money

A. Day workers made \$4. Dressmakers made more around \$8

22 Q. Did this type of work until she left for Aurora

A. She did this after she came back from Aurora

23 Q. Was she here when you got here

A. She was in Aurora. My sister was here

24 Q. Was your aunt a dressmaker before and after going to Aurora

A. She was a dressmaker all the time. Her daughter was one too.

25 Q. Did the daughter live with her aunt and husband at home

A. Yes

26 Q. Was LEMONIA a dressmaker all her life

A. Yes. Her mother too

27 Q. Did you have more than one job at a time

A. I had a housekeeper. She worked while I did nursing. I was a child's nurse; I took nurse training later on. I did not do housework

28 Q. Tell me more about nursing

A. I would dress the children, put them to bed and see that they ate

29 Q. You fed them breakfast, lunch and dinner

A. Yes

30 Q. You did not cook though

A. I did not cook or wash dishes. I left there at 5:00 p.m. My oldest daughter would cook for my children. I paid a \$1.00

a day to the woman to stay at my house. I would get \$8 a day. My oldest daughter shopped at the grocer and cooked dinner

31 Q. Did you wear any special type of clothing

A. I wore all white

32 Q. Did you have to buy it

A. Yes. I did

33 Q. Did it cost a lot

A. Oh about \$6 to \$ 8 a piece

34 Q. For the dress

A. Yes

35 Q. Did you have any benefits

A. Social Security? no

36 Q. Was any one position considered better than another
Let's say I wanted to employ you and I gave you a
choice: housekeeper, cook or a nurse which would you
select

A. Housekeeping was too hard a job. I didn't know how
to cook

37 Q. What were the specific duties

A. A lot of them had laundresses who would come twice a
week to wash and iron

38 Q. Did the housekeeper dust and scrub

A. and vacuum. I guess the cook kept the kitchen clean.
The cook went to bed between lunch and dinner

39 Q. What time was dinner served

A. I'm sure they ate at 6:00

40 Q. Was it a white family you worked for

A. Oh yes.

41 Q. Did you work for one family

A. Oh, different ones

42 Q. Do you remember who they were

A. One lives in Winnetka. She still contacts me. Her husband was president of a big bank in Chicago, George Everett. His son has the same name, he is now president of the same bank

43 Q. Do you remember the others

A. I can't recall the names. She, the woman I just mentioned, had two children. The other woman had four, they lived in Evanston. I took care of the two younger ones.

44 Q. How did you come by the job

A. It look like to me that I went to an employment bureau. I must have had an ad in the paper. I worked in the Presbyterian Hospital when my supervisor quit. I quit too. She gave me the training

45 Q. You were in the hospital before working in homes

A. No. I had been doing private duty then I did hospital work. I had three years experience. I went to school that's when I became a practical nurse

46 Q. You became a licensed practical nurse

A. Yes. For six months I went to school, I worked at night. They said I should work at Cook County hospital; I could get more experience there

47 Q. You worked three years in the hospital.

A. Yes for Three years. I can't remember the place I worked when I was licensed.

48 Q. Was the school associated with Cook County Hospital

A. No. I can't remember the name of the school, I had to have experience at Cook County. I graduated, then I was on my own.

49 Q. Do you remember your age when working for the white families. Were your children in high school

A. (no answer, expression indicated attempts to recall age)

50 Q. Was this before the Depression, 1929

A. All this was after. My husband was writing Life Insurance, he wasn't making much money. I decided I had to go to work

51 Q. Did the white families have gardeners and chauffeur

A. Yes

52 Q. Were there any differences among workers in house

A. Those who weren't in the house lived over the garage

53 Q. Who usually lived there

A. Sometimes the chauffeur and his wife

54 Q. It was the chauffeur who stayed on the premise

A. Yes. The gardener worked from 8:00-4:00

55 Q. This was during the Depression

A. I can't remember. It was a long time. A lot of white families were not able to hire help, even though they wanted to. My husband was trying to collect insurance. The people did not have money

56 Q. He was on commission, right

A. Yes

57 Q. You worked during the lean years

A. Yes. My husband became a Pullman porter. He'd be gone for two weeks at a time

58 Q. Did he make good money on the road

A. Well, his wages were like \$65 a month. That was until Randolph raised it to \$100. He mostly lived off tips.

59 Q. Did they get benefits, those on the road, like hospitalization

A. Yes

60 Q. Did your friends work when you were working during the lean years

A. No work was scarce

61 Q. Were most of the Blacks doing domestic work before the Depression

A. Yes, they cleaned house; cook..Daywork they called it.

My son, Dr. Spencer went to W.W.II; he is over 50 years old. They paid him a small amount. I forgot what it was, maybe \$40-\$50 a month. He would send it to me. He went to North-western on the G.I. Bill; He stayed a year when he went to Mc Harry. He was there and volunteered for the army. He stayed until he got sick in Italy when peace was made.

62 Q. What is his first name

A. Warren

63 Q. Was Warren in high school when you were working as a day nurse

A. I went to night school, 2:00-6:00 p.m. at Univ. of Chicago. The children were in high school, at least four of them. Sarah went to Virginia State. My cousin was president of Virginia State

64 Q. What was your cousins name

A. John Gandy. My grandfathers name was John Gandy. He had eight or nine children and they named their children John. I named my son John Spencer.

Sarah is my grandmother's name, my late sister and my oldest daughter

There was John, Sarah, Margaret, Warren and Grace

65 Q. You had five children when you were a day nurse

A. Yes. I had to come home eventually, the house-keeper would not know where the children were when I would come home

66 Q. How did you get the nurse job. Did you go to an employment agency, or did a friend tell you about the job

A. There were employment agencies

67 Q. Were there any Black employment agencies

A. Oh yes. On the north shore there was one owned by White. There was one on Maple Ave. in Evanston. A Negro owned that one. They got applications from White. Some preferred Negroes instead of White

68 Q. The employment agencies preferred Negroes

A. No the clientele

69 Q. Did they give reasons why

A. A couple of people told me white nurses were not agreeable. They would sit around

70 Q. What do you think about that

A. I believe so. I have a lovely disposition, everyone told me so.

71 Q. Were you ever turned down for a job

A. I organized something, I can not remember the name of it, to get jobs for Negroes. I think they were timid;; I'd go with them to Merchandise Mart

They were not hiring Negroes. I went with them, they were afraid.

72 Q. Was this the federal government

A. Yes. I had been there; they told me they were not hiring Negroes.

73 Q. There was a lot of discrimination

A. Yes. They said they did not hire Negroes. We Picketed

74 Q. Were you eventually hired

A. Yes. I forgot how long we picketed. R. Phillip Randolph organized the Pullman Porters. We got him to organize us

75 Q. What position were you hired for

A. Clerical position, no experience in it. One of their offices was just below Twelvth St. I was hired for three months

76 Q. Did you make much money

A. Oh yeah, a lot of money! At least it seemed so to us. My sister worked for the same place, for 30 years; she's retired now.

77 Q. How much did you earn

A. around \$160

76 Q. Were your two oldest children in high school

A. At that time, I got all of them jobs in D.C. After my daughter graduated from Virginia State, I made her put in an application.

John is the oldest; he went to Topeka Kansas. You know he applied at Northwestern and later they said they did not have the application.

79 Q. He went to McHarry

A. Yes. He stayed a year

80 Q. Were you forty years old then

A. I'll think over that. You know I would put my age back to thirty-five. They didn't hire anyone over forty

81 Q. Did you ever hear of the Negro Business League

A. Yes. I think we met in the library

82 Q. Evanston Public Library

A. Yes. It was for business men and professionals. The "B. & P." they'd call it. Let's see how did I get in? I was considered a professional

83 Q. It was in the 1930's wasn't it

A. It was

84 Q. Do you remember what it was for

A. No. I was very active then

85 Q. You were active in the '30's, politically

A. I was here when women got franchise. We were Republicans then, but we called it the Womens Political Club, so Republicans and Democrats women could join. I was the first president.

I remember Mrs. Duggard, she told them to make me president of the P.T.A. She still lives in Evanston.

86 Q. What is Mrs. Duggard's first name

A. Sadie Duggard, Her husband was an invalid when he died

- 87 Q. Were there any wealthy Negroes
- A. No
- 88 Q. How did we make it, in the 1920's and 1930's. There was relief wasn't there
- A. Yes. I also got six bottles of milk from my sister
- 89 Q. Was every Black person on relief
- A. No. Mr. Eden worked in the Country Club; his daughter Josephine Robinson, born in Evanston, lived in North Evanston. She has bought up most of the block. Mr. Eden and another man were supposed to be well-off.
- 90 Q. Financially
- A. Yes
- 91 Q. They worked at the Country Club and accumulated money
- A. Yes. They got good wages, they got a lot of tips. They were servants.
- 92 Q. They were butlers
- A. Yes, they must have been. They weren't not cooks.
- 93 Q. The club was called Country Club
- A. Yes. It still is there
- 94 Q. Did they ever employ Whites
- A. No
- 95 Q. Did the White families ever have a governess
- A. Oh yes. This woman I mentioned before, did. She had a grounds keeper and a housekeeper
- 96 Q. Was the governess White
- A. Yes. They didn't send children to school then. The governess taught them
- 97 Q. Was there any contact between the governess and the rest of the employees; between the governess and you

A. The chauffeur would drive her places; he had contact with her. She ate with the family

98 Q. She had almost the same status as the family

A. Yes. She was supposed to have more education

99 Q. Were they

A. Usually. Sometimes the mother didn't want to get up. So they would teach the child how to eat, and teach them special manners.

100 Q. Some of the help were married couples, did their children stay with them

A. The employers saved money with a couple, they would do all the work.. The husband would be the gardener, chauffeur, etc. The wife was the cook, housekeeper and nurse. They would make \$200 to \$300 a month. It would be \$250 minimum

101 Q. Were there advantages and/or disadvantages for working in this capacity. Was it an advantage for Whites

A. It was an advantage for both

102 Q. Were most of the couples Negroes

A. No

103 Q. There were white and Negro workers

A. Yes

104 Q. What were some of the advantages

A. Some would maintain rooms in Evanston They had thursdays and usually every other Sunday off.
You know what they get now? \$30 a day!--for daywork.

105 Q. Did they pay rent for room

A. Yes

106 Q. Any other advantages

A. They fed them. They had to have uniforms. These were supplied by the family.

107 Q. Could you describe the uniforms

A. They were green or blue. Oh, when they served dinner they wore black---black dress with white apron

108 Q. Did men wear black and white

A. Yes. Two would serve. Do you know the phrase "pick-up and put down?" That's what it is called

109 Q. Who brought in the food

A. The man would bring in the platter. It was wither fixed in the kitchen, or the host would fix each plate and the woman would serve to guest. As soon as one plate was picked up a clean one would be put down

110 Q. Did the servants eat in the kitchen

A. They ate in the dinette, there was a small one for them.

111 Q. Did day workers eat in the home

A. Yes. The woman would serve

112 Q. The woman of the household. not the cook

A. Yes, often. I have heard that the reason was the woman didn't trust them with the food. She would give them bread, cheese, etc. Only one meal a day

113 Q. Mostly cold meals

A. Yes, not much

You know, my oldest sister died a year ago Mother's Day, Monday. My other sister died New Years Eve. Clothea is the only one left

114 Q. Was the relationship good between White and Blacks in these White homes

A. Generally yes. Sometimes they would hire you for two weeks or a month to see if they like each other

